Crisis? What Crisis?

by John McKenzie



I believe it's often called the man-o-pause. As I embarked upon my 41st trip around the sun, well aware of my unhealthy lifestyle, I made the decision to do something that might benefit both me and others; I would run the London Marathon for charity!

After first measuring a 3 mile route in the car, I waited for darkness to fall so the neighbours wouldn't see me, and set off on my inaugural training run. I thought I was going to die. There was a burning sensation the length of my windpipe and one of my toes throbbed like it had been hit by a hammer.

Two days later (after cutting my toenails), I set off again and it wasn't quite so bad. I tried a 5 mile run at the weekend and after a few weeks of my new fitness regime, felt confident enough to approach my local running club, the curiously named Hardley Runners.

I could never have imagined how my life was to change. The amazing landscapes I would view and the inspirational people I was yet to meet.

My fate was sealed. The enthusiasm I detected in that odd group of men and women, from all walks of life and levels of fitness, and the pride they shared in their running club was addictive.

My FLM open ballot application was successful and I ran London 1997, raising £500 for a local charity, but by then the die was cast. In training with Hardley Runners, I had been well and truly bitten by the running bug., A local 10km, then some RR10's, a Half Marathon and a couple of 5km road races. Later, I was to take club-organised autumn trips to Argentan and weekends in the Lake District, Snowdonia, and Dartmoor. I would meet club members in Totton Car Park and car share to compete in off-road events with intriguing names such as Beast, Plod , Slog, Grim, Doddle, Stinger, Lollop, Hellruner and not forgetting The Rough & Tumble.

Enthused and eager for new running experiences, I was to set my sights on multi-stage events and found myself endurance training with a heavy rucksack. Negotiating styles, streams, thorns, nettles, bracken, barking dogs and foul tempered geese, often in the dark with a head torch and compass. Testing my new kit and navigational skills to compete in The Marathon of Britain, The Pilgrim Challenge and my toughest test to date; the gruelling Marathon des Sables.

Since joining Hardley Runners I have had an incredible journey and long may it continue.

Shortly, I will run under the Brandenburg Gate and cross the finish line of the Berlin Marathon, no longer a 'wannabee' and eligible to apply for full membership of the 100 Marathon Club. Second claim, of course!

John McKenzie
September 2011